



## ***Making the Days Count***

New Year's Day, I'll admit, has reached the top of my "favorite holidays" list—in some measure because this is the third time I've spent the holiday at home in New York City, celebrating the day by relaxing with good friends, succulent food, fine films and compelling conversations.

But in truth, it's my penchant for fresh starts that sets my heart aglow around the turn of the year. I am so infatuated with new beginnings that I must incessantly withstand a compulsion to start new things just to start new things. The start of a semester or a year or an era is energizing.

So by the time the red Starbucks cups showed up, I was already pondering goals—resolutions, if you will—for 2008. Last year, I made only two goals: read 50 books, and write a little fiction (the first was a resounding success; the second, not so much). But those were intellectual goals, and in 2007, I've grown conscious of my need for wholeness—physically, spiritually, mentally and creatively—and that all are necessary to grow into the woman God intends me to be.

I've also noticed my daily messiness. Not so much in our apartment—I keep that pretty clean—but in the way I spread myself thin, taking on extra projects, running hither and yon, inhaling meals, buying and getting rid of things, hanging by a thread but somehow keeping up.

The simple truth is that I don't take enough time for contemplation. I read books and blogs like a glutton—as many as possible, as rapidly as possible. My actual meals sometimes function more as simple sustenance than a celebratory receiving of a gift from the hand of God. When I exercise, I do it as quickly as possible; when I shop for clothes, it's as if the store will implode any moment now and I've got to beat the clock.

I'm yearning for change. God's attention to detail and Jesus' offer of rest is appealing. This year, I've decided to pursue thoughtful, intentional, whole living, even though it promises to be one of the busiest years yet.

### **Physical**

My physical well-being keenly affects the rest of my life. So in caring for my earthly body, I'd like to pay more attention to what I put into it. I eat healthfully, but I want to eat thoughtfully. The Slow Food Movement ([www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com)), which seeks to counteract fast-food culture and promote conscious dining as a pleasurable experience, has been a good source of information and inspiration.

This means eating more contemplatively—rather than shoving food down my gullet, I'll be paying attention to the flavors, complimenting the chef, even considering the cultures that gave birth to the food I'm eating. When shopping for food and cooking, I'll consider the source and quality of the ingredients. Bonus: Eating slowly results in eating less, but leaving the table

more satisfied.

Taking care of my body also means considering the energy I exert. Without a gym membership, I don't get as much aerobic exercise as I'd like in the winter, but until the snow melts and I can go running outside, I'll continue my at-home free weights (I use *The Body Sculpting Bible for Women* for about 20 minutes, three times a week) and choose to walk to the farther subway stop when I can. I plan to turn off the iPod and pay attention to the world around me—colors, sounds, faces.

### **Mental**

Because I'm starting graduate school in January, I'm not sure how much of my reading material I'll get to choose. So instead of setting a numerical goal, I'll concentrate on choose my books carefully, considering how they'll affect my understanding of the world, the culture and my own research interests.

There are lots of other worthy mental goals I'd like to take up someday—doing crossword puzzles to exercise my brain, reading tomes of philosophy and theology and history—but this is an area in which I need to rest.

### **Spiritual**

I've been reading *Eat This Book*, by Eugene Peterson. He outlines the ancient practice of Lectio Divina, the biblical idea of “chewing” on the Scripture, slowly taking in its stories, themes, words. My method has always been to start a rigorous program of reading through the Bible in a year, but now that I've done that, I think it may be time to chew on the Word a bit. I'm considering spending the year in just one book of the Bible, carefully reading and re-reading and journaling through what I learn. I'd like to adopt the discipline of journaling my prayers, as well.

### **Creative**

I call myself a writer, and thankfully, I have many opportunities to write. But in *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott says that some days, you just have to write 300 words and be happy about it. Three hundred words seems very small to me. I like to get it all out on paper. But small bits of writing, crafted with care, sometimes bear more artistry than a long, chatty, stream-of-consciousness blog post. I won't stop with the chattiness, but I'll focus on my craft more deliberately.

I've been thinking about fashion a lot. I'm beginning to see my clothing choices as my creative expression of God's care for me. This requires shopping thoughtfully; rather than rushing to the sale rack and grabbing anything that looks like a bargain, only to be disappointed, I'd like to save my money for well-crafted worthwhile pieces that fit into my now pared-down wardrobe. I'm considering cataloging it all and sticking the list in my day planner, just so I don't waste money on things that are poor quality, the wrong color or repetitive.

Lastly, to keep the creative muscle flexed, I'd like to spend a little time each week dabbling in my “other” arts—piano and photography. I'm just now digging through my stacks of sheet music to see what I want to learn this year (it's looking like J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*). And taking photos helps me look at everything more closely, identifying beauty in unlikely places.

### **Relational**

Goal-setting seems inherently me-centered, but I've realized that the point of these goals should be not to improve myself so that people think I'm cool, but to make me a more loving, serving woman in my relationship with my husband, my family, my friends, my co-workers and my church. If I'm not seeking God with my body, soul and spirit, I have a hard time showing His love to anyone else.

One practical way I hope to grow in my relationships is by simply sending cards. I'm a very lax card-sender. E-cards and Facebook notes have fed my laziness. So this year, I'm making plans to send physical cards to people just to tell them that I love them and value their presence in my life.

I want to learn to obey God by serving His people, so I'm committing to ask Him to work in the lives of my community and to show me ways He wishes to use me. I don't know what this means, exactly. It's a scary prayer. But God answers prayers like this, and I think I'm ready to trust Him, whether it means increasing my giving, working in the church or something I haven't considered. I want to seek to encourage those around me.

Just thinking through these goals brings a sense of peace and gratefulness for the small mercies that God brings into my life—a cup of green tea in the morning, an early morning trip to the farmer's market for fresh apples, an evening spent eating bits of deliciousness over candlelight with friends, the joy of starting a book and having it blow me away, a walk through the snow to the movies with my husband's hand in mine. I don't need to keep ticking things off a list in order to be something in this life; what I need is a deeper understanding of my place in God's world, and a deeper dependence on His provision for me.

Teach us to number our days,  
That we may gain a heart of wisdom ...  
Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,  
That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.  
Psalm 90: 12, 14 (TNIV)

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